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BLACK - WHITE ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

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RESEARCH SUMMARY

Analysis of a national sample on outdoor recreation participation indicates little evidence that Blacks' generally lower rates of participation (in comparison to Whites') in wildland-related activities stem from either inhibitory factors or statistical artifacts of population composition. Blacks' perceived constraints on outdoor recreation participation differed from Whites' only in greater transportation difficulty; desired activities for outdoor recreation tended to accentuate Black-White differences rather than reduce them. Instead, the perspective is presented that Black leisure patterns result from a distinct cultural value and normative system contrasted to White "mass society," suggesting that leisure may in fact function as a mechanism to help maintain contrasting ethnic minority subcultural systems in coexistence with a dominant culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Recreation research literature has demonstrated that minority populations, especially Blacks, participate less frequently than the White majority population in many outdoor recreation activities in both urban and wildland settings (ORRRC 1962; Nieves and Burdge 1971). Observations of outdoor recreation managers in most wildland settings support such findings. Explanations for these ethnic variations in utilizing outdoor recreation opportunities, however, are less clear; interpretations of such observations commonly make use of one of three competing explanations.

The "demographic explanation" suggests that participation differences between populations are simply the result of statistical differences in population composition for characteristics related to participation in certain recreational activities. For instance, if age affects propensity to engage in an activity, populations with varying age structures would manifest different overall participation rates for that activity, though all other factors might be identical.

The "marginality explanation" interprets the underutilization of both city and wildland recreation resources by Blacks as less a reflection of choice than as a consequence of the cumulative effects of social, economic, and education discrimination and segregation practices. Underlying this perspective is the assumption that all recreational resources are equally attractive for both ethnic populations. Consequently, if both population groups had the same opportunity, their participation rates would be nearly identical. From the marginality perspective, Blacks are described typically as having less leisure time, less exposure to the amenities of the outdoors, less adequate means of transportation, and less money available to purchase recreation equipment.

By contrast, the "ethnicity perspective" assumes the existence of minority subcultures with unique value and normative systems that are distinct from those of the American mass-culture. If leisure patterns are viewed as integral elements of subcultural systems, then the observed minority leisure pattern of underutilization becomes, from this perspective, an expression of conformity to these subcultural norms and values.

While the ethnicity perspective has not been established empirically, some efforts have been made to substantiate the validity of the marginality perspective. By and large, the results of these efforts are inconclusive due essentially to methodological problems (Mueller and Gurin 1962; Nieves and Burdge 1971; Cheek, Field, and Burdge 1976). Another problem is the inability to generalize from most recreation studies reporting participation rates. For example, many of these studies have been conducted at specific recreation sites or at the state and regional levels. Few national studies reporting outdoor recreation participation rates have been done against which the results of these more geographically circumscribed studies can be compared.

In 1977, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS), sponsored a national outdoor recreation survey that included "ethnic background" as a demographic variable. The data from this survey present a rare opportunity to examine ethnic differences in participation rates on a national scale; moreover, local, state, and regional patterns can now be compared with the national patterns derived from those recent data.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify theoretically the nature of ethnic differences in participation rates using the HCRS national sample. To assess the applicability of the marginality, demographic, and ethnicity perspectives, the former two are tested together empirically and the latter explored through substantiating sociological and anthropological theory.

Since participation differences could result from disadvantages due to income or educational differences between Blacks and Whites (the "marginality explanation"), or from differences in population structure or location affecting participation (the "demographic explanation"), these causal explanations are examined by holding these independent variables constant; if participation rates of the two groups become nonsignificantly different when these are controlled, the marginality and demographic positions could be sustained. If significant participation differences remain, then other factors are presumed at work. The ethnicity perspective is presented as a promising candidate.

THE HCRS NATIONAL SURVEY

The HCRS conducted its survey of the continental United States population to assess recreation demands and needs as part of its Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan. The sample design and data collection were performed by Opinion Research Corporation. A stratified probability sample of 4,029 households was drawn; age and sex quotas were then used to select respondents within households for telephone interviews conducted in June and July of 1977. Since the ethnic background of respondents was not revealed until the end of the interview, no measure was taken to reduce cross-cultural interviewer bias. A profile on the Black and White respondents is presented in table 1.

Table 1.--*Profile of respondents--1977 National Outdoor Recreation survey*

	White sample	Black sample
Total respondents ¹ (N=3,898)	3,583	315
Males (percent)	49	42
Females (percent)	51	58
Family income (grouped mean)	\$17,300	\$12,300
Mean age (years)	39	34
Mean education (years)	12.6	11.2
Residence (percentage of group)		
Urban	31	50
Suburban	40	25
Rural	29	25
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100
Northeast	26	20
South	23	49
Central	23	18
West	28	13
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100

¹One hundred thirty-one respondents of assorted other ethnic groups were omitted from the analysis, including Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and Canadians.

RESULTS

Participation rates for both Black and White groups in selected outdoor recreation activities are presented in table 2. The Black group does not differ significantly from the White group in those activities typically done in urban recreation settings, including tennis, picnicking, sunbathing, and swimming in outdoor pools. Participation rates for the Black group, however, are significantly lower than those of the White group in activities typically associated with wildland settings--camping (both developed and primitive), water and snow skiing, boating, hiking or backpacking, hunting, and sightseeing (at historical sites or natural wonders). More importantly, table 2 also shows that when both groups were asked to identify outdoor recreation activities in which they do not now participate but would desire to, the Black group was no more likely than the White to want to participate in wildland recreation activities. In fact, both groups tend to desire outdoor recreation activities that are similar to ones they are relatively active in already.

There are some notable exceptions to this pattern for the Black group. Fishing, nature walks, horseback riding, and driving vehicles and motorcycles in off-road areas are all activities in which participation rates of both groups are almost equal.

To determine whether inhibitory "marginality" factors (such as lack of income or educational deficits) or demographic differences in population composition (such as age, sex, or residence) account for these different rates, a subsample of 170 Black and White respondents was drawn and perfectly matched Blacks and Whites on sex, age, income, education, and place of residence (region and urban, suburban or rural community). Participation rates for selected outdoor recreation activities were then compared. The results indicate that most differences in participation rates remain or decrease only slightly (table 3). In some cases, variations in rates could reflect chance sampling errors, as perhaps for "driving for pleasure."

Table 2.--*Participation and desired participation by Blacks and Whites in selected outdoor recreation activities*

Activity	Percentage of group participating		Percentage of group desiring to participate	
	White	Black	White	Black
Camping in a developed area	37	¹ 14	3	4
Camping in a primitive area	26	¹ 9	3	4
Water skiing	20	¹ 3	5	6
Fishing	56	49	2	2
Boating (other than canoeing or river running)	39	¹ 19	2	2
Outdoor pool swimming or sunbathing	66	49	1	¹ 4
Walking to observe nature, bird watching, wildlife or bird photography	53	48	1	1
Hiking or backpacking	35	¹ 20	2	2
Horseback riding	16	16	4	6
Driving vehicles or motorcycles off road	26	25	1	3
Hunting	21	¹ 9	1	1
Picnicking	75	73	0	0
Tennis	35	35	5	10
Downhill skiing	11	¹ 1	7	4
Other outdoor sports or games	56	62	1	1
Sightseeing at historical sites or natural wonders	68	¹ 48	1	1
Driving for pleasure	71	66	0	1
Attending outdoor sporting events	64	65	0	0
	N=3,583	N=315		

¹Differences in proportions of each group participating significant at 0.01 level using Chi-square with 1 degree of freedom.

Table 3.--*Participation in selected activities before and after matching Blacks and Whites on socioeconomic characteristics and area of residence*

Activity	Percentage of each group participating			
	Before matching		After matching ¹	
	White (N=3,583)	Black (N=315)	White (N=170)	Black (N=170)
Developed camping	37	² 14	35	² 15
Primitive camping	26	² 9	26	² 11
Fishing	56	49	57	55
Other boating	39	² 19	37	² 21
Hiking, backpacking	35	² 20	31	21
Off-road vehicles	26	25	27	28
Picnicking	75	73	78	77
Sightseeing	68	² 48	71	² 52
Driving for pleasure	71	66	75	77

¹Blacks and Whites were matched by region and rural-urban residence, grouped income, grouped age, grouped education, and sex.

²Significant at 0.01 level by Chi-square, 1 degree of freedom.

Analysis of the factors that both groups perceive as inhibiting their participation in wildland outdoor recreation in general further clarifies the issue (table 4). Interestingly, factors the Black group perceives as frustrations and on which they differ significantly from the White group are those reflecting problems usually associated with the management of local or neighborhood parks in depressed urban areas, as, for example, poor maintenance and personal safety. The Black group, however, is no more hampered by cost factors than the White group. "Lack of transportation" is the only reported barrier for the Black group that is consistent with the marginality perspective. It does seem clear that transportation to wildland recreation settings is a constraint for Blacks, though the data did not allow a direct measurement of the extent that this barrier accounts for lower participation by Blacks in specific activities.

Table 4.--*Factors preventing use of outdoor recreation areas by race*

Factors preventing use of outdoor recreation areas	Percentage of each group mentioning	
	White (N=3,583)	Black (N=315)
Areas poorly maintained ¹	18.4	28.9
Areas too crowded	44.1	44.8
Areas had problems of pollution	23.3	29.5
Areas had personal safety problems ¹	16.8	26.3
Lack of money	35.2	37.5
Lack of time ¹	54.5	44.8
Lack of interest	20.7	24.4
Lack of transportation ¹	16.7	29.2
Lack of information on outdoor recreation areas	31.0	36.2
Personal health reasons	19.4	18.7
Interesting areas not convenient	27.7	30.2
Do most of my outdoor recreation at residence	28.5	30.5

¹Proportions of each group mentioning this factor significantly different at 0.01 level using Chi-square, 1 degree of freedom.

To explore the influence of transportation on lower participation rates for Blacks in wildland settings, the responses of Blacks and Whites to the question of the importance of distance to recreation sites were analyzed. Table 5 presents distances traveled to recreation sites and the importance attached to various distance zones in pursuing outdoor activities. In general, Blacks made significantly fewer trips to each of the three distance zones than the Whites and tended to concentrate on the zone within a 15-minute walk from home. By contrast, sites within a 1-hour drive from home were most popular for Whites. Both groups made fewer trips to the most remote zone from home.

Table 5.--Importance of an average number of trips per year for recreation to three distance zones for Blacks and Whites

Distance zones	Mean (grouped) annual trips ¹		Percentage indicating distance zone as "very important" for recreation ²	
	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks
Within 15-minute walk	7.5	³ 7.0	49	³ 71
Within 1-hour drive	7.8	³ 6.5	54	54
More than 1-hour drive away	5.9	³ 5.2	39	³ 34

¹Means based on midpoints for the categories: "Never" (0), "1 to 2 trips" (1.5), "3 to 10 trips" (6.5), "more than 10 trips" (assumed as 11).

²Responses for each group sum to more than 100 percent because individuals responded independently to each distance category.

³Black-White differences significant at 0.01 level using Chi-square with 1 degree of freedom.

When the mean number of annual trips made to each zone is compared to the importance each group attaches to distance, a discrepancy emerges within the Black group. Blacks report the local zone as most important for outdoor recreation purposes, but this emphasis is not borne out when the actual number of trips made to each distance zone is considered (table 5). Although Blacks overwhelmingly value the local zone, they nevertheless travel outside it with some regularity. This discrepancy between stated local emphasis and actual travel to more distant places may be a reflection of the difference between what respondents do and what they report they want.

What about travel for specific activities? Do Blacks tend to travel outside the local zone more often for certain activities? How do these patterns compare to Whites engaging in these activities? Table 6 examines Black participation rates for selected activities by comparing them to Whites' participation as a percentage. This relationship to Whites shows that Black participation is lower in almost all instances for all three distance zones, and tends to decline with greater distance in comparison to White participation in these distance zones. There is, however, some variability between activities; fishing, for instance, retains a very similar ratio at all zones. In sum, it appears that, though Blacks do tend to travel somewhat less, they are still willing or able to do so, especially for certain activities. Unfortunately, the data do not permit a deeper analysis. The key question that remains unsatisfactorily answered concerns the relative importance of location of participation opportunities versus the activity itself in determining Black leisure style.

Table 6.--Comparison of Black and White participation in selected activities at different distance zones

Activity	Blacks' rates of participation expressed as a percentage of Whites' rates of participation of various distances from home			
	Over- all ¹	15-minute walk	Less than 1-hour drive	Greater than 1-hour drive
Camping in a developed area	38	40	28	32
Fishing	88	75	75	77
Hiking or backpacking	57	45	53	47
Driving ORV's	96	108	94	68
Picnicking	97	97	86	78
Sightseeing	71	87	70	59
Driving for pleasure	93	105	85	72

¹Overall rates may vary from rates at various distances since individuals responded independently for each distance zone and overall; the former, therefore, are not necessarily additive.

Additional evidence of the preference of the Black group for urban, developed facilities can be seen in the analysis of responses on priorities for Federal spending on recreation. Both groups prefer small, nearby parks. But, when compared to the White group, the Black group tends more toward urban parks (as opposed to rural ones), toward more facilities instead of more land, toward indoor instead of outdoor facilities, and toward inland rather than waterfront sites (table 7).

Table 17.--*Blacks' and Whites' preferences for selected priority choices for Federal spending on outdoor recreation*

Priority choice for Federal spending on outdoor recreation	Percentage of each group indicating their priority for spending	
	White	Black
1. For small, nearby parks	73	77
For a limited number of large parks across the country	23	19
Both	4	4
¹ 2. In urban areas	45	56
In rural areas	44	32
Both	11	12
3. For better maintenance of existing parks	50	49
Developing new parks	41	42
Both	9	9
¹ 4. For more facilities	51	63
For more lands	43	30
Both	6	7
¹ 5. For waterfront property	42	28
For inland property	46	64
Both	12	8
¹ 6. For indoor recreational facilities	14	21
For outdoor recreational facilities	75	61
Both	11	18

¹Groups differ significantly on this priority question at the 0.01 level by Chi-square, 2 degrees of freedom.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the analysis of the national data lend little support for the marginality or demographic explanations, which posit that (1) Blacks desire to participate in wildland outdoor recreation activities but do not because of their marginal socioeconomic status, or that (2) population composition differences cause variations in participation. External constraints (transportation, income or educational deficits) seem to be only part of the cause of the described pattern exhibited by the Black group.

Similar conclusions have been reported elsewhere by Washburne (1978). That analysis of Black and White residents in eight urban areas in California indicates only limited effect of socioeconomic factors on leisure differences between the groups. The Black group tended to participate less frequently than the White in most wildland activities. They were as or more active than the White in sport activities, small group activity in local parks, and as spectators at outdoor events. In this same analysis, when the Black and White groups were matched on age, sex, income, education, and place of residence, the degree of difference in participation rates for most wildland recreation activities remained. The analysis of the California data, however, indicates some reservations; the age of the data (collected in 1969) and the limitation of the sample to depressed urban areas in California made temporal and geographical generality an issue.

Factors other than socioeconomic ones seem clearly at work, but were not expressed in the rather traditional data bases in the California and national survey analysis. Such data, which often focus on participation in specified activities, general location of activities, and constraints on participation, leave little room for assessing effects of culture or social structure on participation or for tracing how individual participation decisions are made. A new approach, expressed in the ethnicity perspective, would concentrate on the social milieu in which Black leisure activities occur, on how leisure time as a whole is spent, and on how all potential influences (constraints of money, time, or mobility, as well as norms, social pressures, and cultural values) affect leisure choices. Models and field techniques drawn from ethnography and cultural anthropology suggest themselves as potentially productive approaches.

A concept termed "boundary maintenance" may be one such avenue. Anthropologists have given considerable attention to how cultural differences are maintained by ethnic groups coexisting in pluralistic societies, in spite of pressures toward assimilation. This work may prove a useful means for looking at contrasting minority leisure patterns. For example, Barth (1969) rejects the idea that ethnic differences can only be maintained in the absence of social interactions across ethnic boundaries. He argues to the contrary: it is in the context of the cross-cultural interactions themselves that socially effective mechanisms are used that permit ethnic boundaries to be maintained. For ethnic groups in contact with each other, boundary maintenance implies "not only criteria and signals for identification but also a structuring of interaction which allows the persistence of cultural differences" (Barth 1969).

Ethnic boundaries, according to Barth, may involve territory but are largely social; that is, they are derived from recognized norms that serve to structure cross-cultural contacts. Such structuring effects regulating social behavior within the Black subculture have been well documented in earlier studies. For example, Frazier (1957) cites the historical impact of enforced segregation resulting in a Black community social structure that serves to insulate its members from the effects of discrimination. More recent studies by McCord and others (1969) and Olsen (1970) describe forms of community organization within the Black subculture that serve the general function of discouraging contact with White society. In light of these findings, it seems reasonable to think that structuring of leisure activities may indeed serve a similar purpose.

Some empirical evidence supports this notion. Lee (1973) reports a kind of territorial definition by Blacks (and other groups) of portions of public beaches in California. He observed that Blacks preferred specific reservoirs for fishing activity and "staked out" unambiguous Black enclaves on the beaches. Suttles (1969) contrasts minority cross-cultural contacts in school, employment, or economic settings with those in more informal social settings. From the minority's perspective, social interaction in the formal settings tends to conform to norm and value systems of the dominant culture. By contrast, interaction in informal social settings is more reflective of the subculture's norms and values. The informal settings are where most nonwork time is spent and are typically located in the ethnic community. If the idea of ethnic boundary maintenance, both social and territorial, is extended to the nonwork world, leisure may play an especially important role in maintaining ethnic identity by perpetuating cultural differences in leisure choices.

In this light, leisure choices may be governed by at least two cultural factors. First, outdoor recreation choices may be made to conform to activities traditionally valued by the group, as fishing seems to be for Blacks, and to avoid activities that may be interpreted by members as inconsistent with ethnic norms, values, or tradition. Some wildland recreation activities, for example, may retain "White" identities and hence appear "across the boundary" to Blacks, discouraging participation.¹ Second, both the activity and the site where it takes place may serve to set off and contrast the ethnic group from other groups. When ethnic group members congregate at recreation locations for characteristically popular activities (such as Blacks' lake fishing), activities thus provide opportunities permitting the ethnic community to be extended beyond residential boundaries, if any exist. In cases where no spatially defined ethnic residential community exists, leisure sites and activities may play an even more significant role in maintaining and enhancing identity by providing a locus for periodic congregation.

The heart of the issue of ethnic identity is the nature of American minority "cultures" and their future as entities distinct from "mass culture." The "culture of poverty" perspective of minority social systems (viewed simply as hardship-adaptive strategies rather than true cultures) advanced by Lewis (1966) is now generally discredited in the social science community; the resurgence of interest in ethnic cultural roots among Blacks, Chicanos, and other groups supports the existence of true subcultures. Simultaneously, the "melting pot" perspective of assimilative American mass-society has largely given way to a pluralistic view. The ultimate assimilation of Blacks and others into the value and normative systems of a mass-culture is no longer taken for granted.

¹A review of historical and psychological perspectives on Blacks' relationship to wildlands is presented by Washburne (1978).

For leisure, the pluralistic perspective of society has far-reaching policy consequences. First, equalizing intergroup recreation participation (beyond reducing obvious inhibitive factors) is no longer a necessarily appropriate policy goal. If everyone's values are no longer presumed to fit within the same normative distribution, and leisure choices assumed as a product of such values, then rates of participation in activities cannot be expected to equalize once opportunities to participate are evenly available. Hence, all members of society are no longer potentially likely users of public recreation resources (especially nonurban wildlands), and public support of such resources may constitute subsidy of particular groups at the exclusion of others. If policy goals are to enhance leisure that contributes most to interpersonal and community solidarity, then they may include accepting diverging leisure styles for minorities in respect to Whites, if leisure indeed plays a role in cultural identity as has been suggested. For Blacks this may mean support for activities in which they differ most from Whites, rather than concentrating on bringing Black rates up to White levels, especially in wildland recreation. Similarly, campaigns to redress imbalances in White and Black use of national and state park and forest resources would be dubiously appropriate or effective under pluralistic assumptions, especially if inhibitory causal factors were found no longer operative. Different ethnic and cultural groups would be the best judges of their own recreational preferences.

If leisure policies are to facilitate the well-being of all individuals, they must be based on knowledge of how leisure functions in different elements of society. Decisionmakers are now turning away from broad prescriptions for outdoor recreation deemed "good for everyone," and focusing more on specific needs of different groups. If these group needs are to be served, policies must account for both unique problems and socio-cultural attributes of groups as they constrain and guide leisure choices. Further study of the different ways by which ethnic identity is maintained may facilitate these processes.

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This paper clarifies theoretically the nature of ethnic differences in participation of blacks and whites in outdoor recreation. The study used substantiating sociological and anthropological theory. Analysis of a national sample indicates little evidence that Blacks' generally lower rates of participation (compared to whites) stem from either inhibitory factors or statistical artifacts of population composition. Rather, Black leisure patterns result from a distinct cultural value and normative system contrasted to White "mass society."

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The Intermountain Station, headquartered in Ogden, Utah, is one of eight regional experiment stations charged with providing scientific knowledge to help resource managers meet human needs and protect forest and range ecosystems.

The Intermountain Station includes the States of Montana, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, and western Wyoming. About 231 million acres, or 85 percent, of the land area in the Station territory are classified as forest and rangeland. These lands include grasslands, deserts, shrublands, alpine areas, and well-stocked forests. They supply fiber for forest industries; minerals for energy and industrial development; and water for domestic and industrial consumption. They also provide recreation opportunities for millions of visitors each year.

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